

The Lord is My Shepherd

Text:

PSALM

In the Gospels we read many times where Jesus used the words sheep and shepherd as an illustration. Quite naturally sheep and shepherds go together, because you can't have one without the other. A shepherd was a sort of special breed of person. He had to be patient for one thing because sheep are not the smartest of animals and they are easily lost and strayed. We use an illustration of sheep in one of our prayers of confession. We say, "All we like sheep have gone astray." So a shepherd had to be alert and almost constantly on the job to see that one of his sheep did not stray from the fold. Then a shepherd had to be loving. He had to love these poor dumb animals he was taking care of. If he didn't love them there would be no need for his services. Why have someone take care of something if that person doesn't care what happens to it? Then too the shepherd had to be willing to go look for the lost sheep. Sometimes this involved danger, as there were wolves lurking near the sheep, and sometimes these sheep would wander out on steep slopes and couldn't get up or down the hill. Then the shepherd had to rescue the sheep. The 23rd Psalm is referred to as the shepherds Psalm. The reason is quite obvious.

The Psalmist perhaps was out watching his sheep, and his thoughts were on God and the thought came into his mind, why God is just like a shepherd. If we take the Psalm verse by verse we can see just how God can be compared to a shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The shepherd looked after his flock. They had no real needs or wants. He took care of them, he saw to it that they got what they needed. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. The one big job of the shepherd was to see that the sheep had plenty of grass to feed on. When they had eaten the grass in one area he moved them to another. He leadeth me beside the still waters, he restoreth my soul. The shepherd had to also see that they had plenty to drink, because water is as important to an animal as it is to a human. Then too you and I know how refreshing a drink of water is sometimes. It seems to revive us, to make us feel refreshed and to restore our very souls. This must also be true of animals sometimes in the hot summer. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. The shepherd had

to know the paths and trails to take. He had to know which way was the best one for the sheep to travel. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. The sheep were kept safe from harm by the watchful eye of the shepherd. He had his staff always ready to poke a sheep to keep him in line or to prevent him from going into the briars and brambles. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. The threat of danger from wolves and other wild animals was always present when the flock were grazing. But under the watchful eye of the shepherd the danger was minimized. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. The shepherd was good and he was kind to his sheep. He cared for all their needs and they were well taken care of. This Psalm must have been where Jesus drew His illustrations about sheep and shepherds.

Yet this Psalm is literally true. Perhaps we have never thought of the fulfillment of God's plan in this way. But if we compare the life of Jesus with this Psalm we can see that God caused His plan to be enacted in the life of Jesus.

Jesus had a special purpose that He came to do. With this purpose in mind He lived the complete God centered life. Everything He did and everything He said was directed to furthering the kingdom of God. In this way He was like a shepherd. He was leading the flock to the greener pasture. In other words teaching and showing people that God was the answer in their lives. He was not only keeping the sheep from straying, but He was trying to bring new sheep into the fold. This was the main theme of the life of Jesus.

Then Jesus was loving like a shepherd. He loved people, He loved children and He must have loved animals from the way He talked about sheep. He showed His love by the things that He did. He healed people who were rejected because they were diseased and repulsive because of their diseases. He helped those who were poor, and those who were shunned in society. All of this required love. This was the love that the people of his day could not understand. Why does a stranger want to help another stranger? Why there must be an ulterior

motive behind someone doing things for strangers. This is what His critics said and this is what our critics are still saying today. It's hard for someone who does not understand to figure out just what it is Christianity stands for. It is based on love and lived in love and it can never be anything else..

Then Jesus had to be willing to assume the risks involved in being a shepherd. For Him this meant staying just one jump ahead of the authorities who were ever anxious to have Him killed. Jesus knew what His opposition had in mind because He spoke of it several times. Yet He also knew that in the end He had to sacrifice Himself for His sheep. This He did on Calvary's cross. So you see He lived the life of the shepherd while fulfilling the will of God. This was God's purpose for sending His Son into the world and it is surprising how His life parallels that of a simple shepherd.

Because of Christ's identifying of Himself with the shepherds and sheep, much in the Christian religion has been written and painted along these lines. (For Salem only) Behind me you see the painting of the Good Shepherd.. This is a familiar painting. It has been done many times by different painters. But there is one vivid picture of the Good shepherd that has been painted that is not only different from the rest, but the picture it portrays is one of a man risking himself for a sheep. It is called the "Lost Sheep", and it was painted by Alfred Soord.. A man named Bailey wrote a book entitled "The Gospel in Art" and in it he makes a statement about shepherds. He is particularly speaking about paintings. Quote, The trouble with most of the good shepherds is that they are good for nothing. The theme has been handled over and over again from the time of the catacombs down, but usually one sees the same type of picture, the figure of a pretty man holding a lamb in his bosom. To one who has seen shepherds in Palestine there is something particularly repugnant in such a representation. No real shepherd ever wore the elegant draperies that adorn these models.. When you come upon a real shepherd in the shepherds country something is apt to grip your heart and your throat.. Shepherding there is a man's job. There you see the rough jacket made of a fleece turned wool side in; the bare bronzed chest; the bare legs scratched with thorns; rough shoes of rawhide; the great club of oak with its

knot on the end heavy enough to fell a bear; the high stepping stride and the muscles of steel that endure the tramps over rocky country, the fearless eye that can face danger alone; and you often see a lamb in the strong arms. Such is the person Jesus had in mind when he said "I am the good shepherd." " Unquote.

This is the picture MR. Spord painted. As we look at this picture we can see a shepherd in very rough clothing, high atop a mountain, clinging to a rock as he stretches as far as he can to reach a sheep who is caught in a thicket below him. The side of the mountain is very rocky, steep and thorn infested. Above eagles are soaring awaiting the opportunity to strike at the helpless animal. Now I am not saying that the calm and peaceful pictures of the good shepherd are not acceptable. But sometimes they can give us a false picture of what a shepherd is, what a shepherd endures and what his purpose is. Jesus was far removed from the shepherd in clean elegant robes which we see portrayed. He was the working shepherd ready and willing to sacrifice Himself for His sheep.

Then there are several hymns that have been written about the good shepherd. One of these is titled, "Saviour Like a Shepherd Lead Us." Saviour like a shepherd lead us, much we need thy tender care; in thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare. Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus. thou hast bought us thine we are; Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus thou hast bought us thine we are. The author of this hymn is unknown. Although we do not know the author, the beautiful words and the melody live on in the church because they express the deep seated longing of every soul for the Master.

Perhaps the other hymn is the most familiar to us. This hymn was written by James Montgomery in 1822. The content and the theme of the hymn is taken from the 23rd Psalm. Were it not for the fact that ~~it isn't a good policy~~ ^{WE KNOW DIFFERENTLY} to copy someone else's material, we ^{would} ~~could~~ say that the Psalmist wrote this hymn too. They are so close in wording and phraseology. Yet there is a distinct beauty to the words. The title of the hymn is simply, "The Lord is My Shepherd."

It goes like this,

The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know, I feed in green pastures safe folded I rest. He leadeth my soul where the still waters flow, restores me when wandering

EmLenton 9:30 4/28/68

*Processional Hymn 468
*Solemn Declaration
*Call to Worship Pg. 168
Confession of Sin
*Assurance of Pardon
Responsive Reading Sel 33 Pg. 583
Hymn 38
Scripture Psalm 23, John 10:11-16
*Gloria Patri
*Apostles Creed
*Pastoral Prayer & Response
~~Anthem~~
Announcements

SPRING MEETING CL. ASSOC.
ST. PAUL'S CHICORA
REV. HIAK NEAT, SUN.

Offering, Prayer
*Hymn 290
Sermon
Prayer & Lord's Prayer
*Hymn 22/
Benediction
*Threefold Amen
*Postlude

Salem Lamartine 11:00 4/28/68

*Processional Hymn 329
*Solemn Declaration
*Call to Worship Pg. 165
Confession of Sin
Assurance of Pardon
Scripture Psalm 23, John 10: 11-16
*Gloria Patri
Apostles Creed
*Prayer
Anthem
Announcements

SPRING MEETING CL. ASSOC.
ST. PAUL'S CHICORA
REV. HIAK NEAT, SUN.
YOUTH FELL, 6:30

Offering, Response, Prayer
Hymn 317
Sermon
Prayer & Lord's Prayer
Hymn 286
Benediction
*Threefold Amen
*Postlude